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NATIONALISM IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE¹

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The time and the place are the fitting setting for a discussion of the nationalism of the British Empire—that Empire which is more than a State, more than a union of States, greater than a confederation, more powerful than a league; an Empire composed of so many different, diverse and, at times, seemingly antagonistic elements that it has long been predicted by statesmen and theorists it would disintegrate at the first shock. The test has been met and endured. The British Empire is stronger because of the stress.

In a few hours there will be brought to a close the most blood stained year in all history. No man dare predict what misery or happiness the mystery of the new year will reveal, how many maps of Europe will be rolled up, who will make the penitential pilgrimage to Canossa, whether thrones will be shaken in the dust or nations survive; but one prophecy can be made, and for that the vision of the seer is not necessary. The events of the last eighteen months have proved to the world that the British Empire is bound by no frail rope of sand but is linked by bonds of steel. It is no weak structure built on shifting ground. It is an Empire of many races and creeds, but one in its unity. Come what may, the British Empire lives, and in the year to come, as in

¹ An address before the American Political Science Association in Washington, D. C., December 31, 1915.

the years to follow, no matter what sacrifices it may be called upon to make the spirit of nationality will become more vigorous, for its people are now united as never before. They are in very fact blood brothers. In Flanders and in France, in the Gallipoli peninsula and in Serbia the soil has been stained with the blood of the Empire, the blood of the motherland, its dominions and colonies, and the blood of its sons is the strength of Empire. Eighteen months ago the Empire was to many of its people an expression, today it is a living reality. For it men have died. And that for which men make glad sacrifice is to the living sacred.

No place more appropriate than Washington, not even London itself, could be selected for a discussion of the nationalism of the British Empire, for it was Washington, the man, and the lesson taught us in the eighteenth century by the United States that brought about the change in the governance of the Empire that laid the foundation of its strength.

I have often regretted that English boys and the students of English universities are not required to study American history. It would, I believe, well repay the time devoted to the subject, and if the study was intelligently pursued it would not only enable Englishmen to have a more sympathetic comprehension of America but in time they might be able to make Americans understand the causes that brought about the separation between the motherland and her American colonies. Most Americans have only vague ideas on the subject. Many believe that it was some sort of a petty dispute about the price of tea—as if one of the great epochs of history was of no greater dignity than a corner grocery squabble between its grasping proprietor and a shrewish housewife—others have some sort of a hazy notion that “taxation without representation” made the colonists take up arms. Now the truth is that England lost her American colonies because England was not one whit better nor one whit worse than her time, no more intelligent and no less selfish than her age. A colony was regarded by the parent state as something to be exploited, and the colonists, to use a very expressive Americanism, were “to be charged all that the traffic would bear.” It had always been so. It was the baleful legacy of the ancients. It

was the teachings of Rome too faithfully observed by Spain, Holland, France and England when they spread out and brought the undiscovered lands under their dominion. Almost invariably the colony came to the parent state as the spoils of war, an alien people were brought under alien ownership, and seldom if ever did sympathy or a desire for mutual understanding enter into the relation. The colony was regarded simply as a source of wealth, valuable only as it could be made to yield to the tax gatherer, valueless if it did not swell the national revenues. The Greeks as well as the Romans, the Spanish, the Dutch, the French and the English traveled this miserable road. Whether it was satrapy, province, possession or colony they were all administered with the sole purpose to make the suzerain rich regardless of the injury done to the vassal.

To America came not a new people but an old race who gathered new ideas from a virgin soil. Perhaps the ideas were not new, perhaps they had long been germinating, but it was on the soil of the American continent they first struck root and came into flower. The American colonists were not only tired of being exploited for the profit of England but they were resolute enough to resist it. The consequences we all know.

But greater consequences were to follow, that is, if it be permissible to suggest to this audience there could be consequences greater even than the independence of the United States. The lesson taught by the American colonists was not learned immediately, because governments are slow to learn and obstinate in adhering to tradition, but it was the beginning of a new relation between Great Britain and her colonies, and it made possible the Empire as we today know it, an Empire held together by strong ties of affection, mutual interest and conviction in the justice and benevolence of British rule. The change did not come at once—it is only nature that is catastrophic, man is never; for nature lets her fury loose when she is in reforming mood, but man must work with infinite patience—generation after generation of statesmen had to pass before the old system of colonisation was abandoned. The age long theory of government of the Greeks and the Romans was replaced by the British. That is the world's

debt to England. She has taught the world the science of the government of colonies; of colonies built up by her sons who have gone across the seas and planted the seed in a new land, as well as colonies of men alien in speech and color.

Experience taught British statesmen that there could be no permanent connection between the parent state and a colony unless it was the same relation that ought to exist between parents and children. If a father regards his sons as simply the means of increasing his own income, if he abuses their tender strength and takes from them their wages, for him they will have no sense of gratitude and no feeling of affection, rather they will sullenly think of him as a harsh taskmaster and count the days when they can escape from his control. Let him, on the other hand, protect them and encourage them in their youth, and in their manhood they will support his declining years, and feel the pride of family.

It is as a benevolent parent England has dealt with her colonies since she was freed from the intellectual shackles of Greece and Rome. A well known English publicist has put in an epigram the English character by saying "we shall follow our rather sensible British custom of first doing a thing and then discovering that we have done it," which is an admirable presentation of the English mind. The English are not a logical race. They do not reason deeply, nor have they the power and love of analysis. But they have a peculiar faculty of doing a thing and then discovering not only that they have done it but that it was the right thing to do. Had Frenchmen or Germans been possessed of the colonising spirit of England in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and had it penetrated their intelligence that the old system was wrong and a new relation must exist between the parent state and its colonies, doubtless voluminous disquisitions, brilliant, logical and keenly analytic in the one case, and profoundly scientific in the other, would have been written in support of the charge. You will find little of this in English writings. You will find, of course, controversy and criticism, you will find men with a glimmering of the truth, who resented being kept in a state of tutelage, who saw the folly of a system that must inevit-

ably lead to disaster, but there was no philosopher with vision great enough and brain strong enough to create a school.

The change came about, as I have said, gradually, casually almost, if I may use the word, born of experience. The loss of the American colonies had shown that it was impossible for a sea flung empire to endure if the strength and wealth of a colony were to be drained for the enrichment of the motherland, which instead of performing the function of a mother and nurturing her young was a harpy to suck their vitality. Statesmen sat at the feet of economists and to their amazement learned that a nation did not become rich simply because it sold, but there was a profit to be made when it bought. The old fear that a colony would become so rich and so strong that it would assert its independence gave place to the knowledge that the wealth and strength of a colony contributed to the wealth and strength of the Empire, that the colony could be conscious of its own nationality without weakening the spirit of the nationality of the Empire; that autonomy was not inconsistent with imperial unity.

That, in a few words, is the principle on which the British Empire of today is founded. Great Britain has no jealousy of her colonies and her colonies have no fear of Great Britain. Our self governing dominions are in fact as well as in name dominions. They are no less self governing and independent states, practically sovereignties, because of the Imperial connection, rather it is the Imperial connection that has enabled them to be independent nations; independent in everything that affects themselves, partners in the Empire of which they are justly proud. A Canadian, an Australian, a South African holds dual allegiance. He is a citizen of his own nation, glorying in its past and confident of its future; a past inseparably associated with the Empire, its future not apart from but a part of the Empire he has helped to build and to maintain. The more intense that spirit of local allegiance the greater the devotion to the Empire.

These are not mere assertions. The proof is to be found in the events of the last year, it is written in the bloodsoaked fields of Northern France, Serbia, and Turkey. When war was declared the Empire responded. Canadians vied with English-

men, Australians with Scotchmen, South Africans with Welsh, Indians with Irishmen, inspired by the devotion they had for their own country, as well as for all the other countries composing the Empire. Here then was the test to determine whether the British Empire was merely patches of red on the map or a living entity held together by the dynamic agent of nationalism. The Empire has been consecrated anew in the blood of its children.

It is curious how men love to discuss questions with seriousness when the discussion is purely academic and how their fine spun theories are shattered when the necessity compels action. It was only a few years ago that in more than one of the self governing dominions newspapers and responsible ministers argued that an act of war by Great Britain did not necessarily involve the rest of the Empire. England, they held, might be at war, South Africa or Canada might remain at peace unless their governments declared in favor of war; in the absence of that declaration they were neutral. It was of course an absurd and ridiculous theory, because an Empire cannot be a unit in peace and independent and detached states when one of them is at war. It is not necessary that I should discuss that phase of colonial political thought, I mention it simply as of interest contrasted with what has actually happened. When war was declared last August a year ago there was no question of Canada or South Africa or any other dominion, dependency or colony remaining neutral and being absolved from its status as a belligerent. The sword had been drawn, and in all parts of the Empire men were girding themselves for the struggle.

I think what happened in August, 1914, is one of the most remarkable incidents in all history, the significance of which has been too little appreciated because, despite its tremendous importance, it was done so undramatically. Consider what did happen. The British Government went to war without consulting the rest of the Empire, without the slightest assurance of support from its over sea dominions, without any direct appeal to them for assistance. It took it for granted that support and assistance would be forthcoming, nor was this confidence misplaced. No man white or black then debated the question, no

government, autonomous or imperially controlled, had any doubt as to its duty. How magnificently that duty has been performed the world knows. Inspired by the spirit of nationalism dominions and dependencies, animated by loyalty and affection, gave the best of their manhood and their wealth for the protection of the Empire.

It was perhaps not surprising that countries settled by the English should prove their descent when England was in peril, but India's devotion stands, I think, without parallel. A dependency won by the sword and for generations held by the sword, whose people are alien in thought and language and customs to the ruling class, like them responded with the same alacrity to the trumpet's call, like them were filled with the same determination to protect the Empire. The native population knows that England has given them justice and improved their condition; the great chiefs knew that if England withdrew from India peace and order would be destroyed. It is a widespread belief that England exacts a heavy tribute from her great eastern dependency, but this is not true. Not one penny of the Indian revenues is diverted from the Indian treasury, the taxes paid by the people of India are spent in India for the support of the government and the development of the country. India is not autonomous, conditions make that impossible at the present time, but every year sees a larger measure of self government entrusted to the natives and a constant increase in the number of native officials. When Turkey allied herself with Germany the Sultan proclaimed a *jéhad* and called upon all true believers to come to the defence of Islam, but the Mohammedans of India have remained loyal to the King-Emperor and fought their fellow religionists, the subjects of the Sultan. The former spiritual allegiance of the Mohammedans of India to the Sheik-ul-Islam has been submerged by the greater secular allegiance to the nationalism of the British Empire.

Nationalism has grown, the ties of Empire have become stronger year by year, because after the first step the way was made easy. The first step, as you have been told, was to discard the old idea of a colony treated as an appanage and instead

to look upon the colony as an integral part of the Empire, entitled to the same consideration of justice, benevolence and commercial advantage as the parent state; not to be held perpetually in tutelage but to be practically sovereign within its own borders; the maker and enforcer of its own laws; subject only to nominal, but nevertheless effective, imperial control. Such a system naturally brought all parts of the Empire in intimate contact and while encouraging state pride, using that term in its largest meaning, did not weaken the spirit of nationality. How well the system worked we see in South Africa. It was only yesterday, as history measures time, that Briton and Boer were enemies, and today Briton and Boer are loyally fighting side by side the common enemy. That alone would vindicate British statesmanship and prove the strength of the Empire.

I have given you more than one reason why in the past a perdurable Empire was impossible, and it became possible only when the genius of British statesmanship discovered the basic vice and removed it; now let me call your attention to a still further development of the great principle that an Empire to last must be governed not by self-imposed authority but by all its component parts having a voice in the government so far as their own interests are concerned.

Heretofore it was deemed inexpedient and dangerous for a colony to be entrusted with any share in the treaty making power. The treaty was a powerful weapon in the hands of the home government, it would be used as coercion or bribe, it was therefore too valuable a prerogative to be delegated. Nominally all British treaties are made by the British Foreign Office, which is the only agency recognized by foreign governments in international relations, actually the dominions make their own commercial arrangements, and they are consulted by the home government whenever a political treaty is negotiated which in any way affects them. So far has this recognition extended that it is not merely a private arrangement between the Imperial Government and the dominions, and in that case it would be simply a matter of domestic policy, but it has become part of the policy of the British

Empire, of which formal notice has been given to the world by a clause inserted in the treaty to the effect that in any matter affecting the interests of a self governing dominion of the British Empire the concurrence of the government of that dominion must first be obtained.

Stop for a moment and think of the enormous historical development in colonisation. Compare the Roman rule of colonies that destroyed them economically, the Spanish colonising adventurers in America who came merely to wrest their spoil of gold and silver, and the spirit that has possessed the English colonist. The first thing the Romans did when they conquered a province was to build good roads, as good roads were a military necessity for the rapid march of their legions to enforce respect for the might of Rome. The first thing the English have done is to establish a government and set up courts of law so that the native might know justice would not be denied him. Under the Roman system there was little inducement for the conquered to merge their nationalism in the nationality of the conqueror; the English system while making no attempt to rob the native of his nationality, has unconsciously made him proud of his greater nationality, of the connection that unites him to the British Empire by "the crimson thread of kinship."

A Roman statesman, and for that matter an English statesman two centuries ago, could not have conceived the paradox of the loyalty of a colony to the parent state increasing the more the control of the home government relaxed. "Unless those troublesome colonists feel the iron hand," our statesman of the past would have said, "they will break loose. We won't encourage them by putting any foolish notions into their head; we won't let them take the first step that is always dangerous and proverbially leads to disaster;" and the statesman honestly believed that the only way to prevent separation was to keep the colonists in leading strings. The truth we see is the reverse. The mother country has paved the way to separation by granting the colonies autonomy and allowing each to work out its own destiny, and instead of that freedom encouraging them to cut the

imperial painter and voyage under their own command it has strengthened the bonds of imperial unity. In the words of our greatest poet of empire:

Daughter am I in my mother's house,
But mistress in my own.
The gates are mine to open,
As the gates are mine to close.

This, I repeat, is the difference between the British Empire and all other empires that have preceded it—this dual status of mother as well as daughter, this system that makes for self government without destroying empire government. Rome, whether a so-called republic or under the sway of the Caesars, was never a republic as we understand a republican form of government, but was always an autocracy resting upon military force; Greece approached nearer our conception of democracy, and in some respects it was analogous to the British Empire. It was an aggregation, not a confederation, it should be remembered, of self governing communities, some continental and some insular, whose system of government was democratic, to whom sea power was as vital as it is to the British Empire, and who were a trading rather than a military people, but who could fight when necessity arose, as Marathon and Salamis bear witness.

Yet Greece went down very easily, and the reason is not obscure. The Greek city states were independent but not imperial, and there was no imperial nexus to weld them into one imperial unity. They were like a man whose limbs are perfectly developed but whose brain is atrophied, hence there is no coördination, and the extremities are not fully energised. Marvellous people as the Greeks were, marvellous people as the Romans were, so wonderful that they did things we with all our knowledge have not been able to equal, far less to excel, they were unable to grasp what to us is so self evident that a schoolboy accepts it as a truism, and not stopping to reflect regards it as natural as a chick should be hatched from an egg. Neither Greek nor Roman could perceive the paradox of independence and dependence, authority marching side by side with subordination, local self

government supreme and yet yielding willingly to imperial requirements; dominions their own masters and still remaining the loyal children of their common parent.

If we look back less than half a century we shall see how narrowly the British Empire escaped the fate of all other empires. In the years when Mr. Gladstone was at the height of his power and the Manchester school threatened to destroy England with its pernicious policy of *laissez faire*, when Cobdenism was a fetich and cheapness was the one lesson political economy was required to teach, the colonies were held almost in contempt and regarded so lightly that it was immaterial whether they remained attached to the Empire or separated; more than one statesman looked upon the colonies as a nuisance and would gladly have seen the imperial connection dissolved; manifest destiny meant eventual separation: an amicable separation that would leave Great Britain stronger because she could devote all her energy to the development of her own resources and the extension of her trade unvexed by fear of political complications brought about through the colonies.

Fortunately destiny and the weakness of the colonies were more powerful than the short sighted folly of governments administered by incompetence. Had the colonies been as vigorous, as thickly populated and as conscious of their strength then as they are today I think it more than probable that the hope of Liberal statesmen would have been realized, the colonies would have struck the flag and raised their own standards, and the British Empire would have been only a historical memory. It is our good fortune that the colonies were in their youth and they were held to the Empire by sentimental as well as material considerations, men with greater vision came into power, and the danger, at one time very real and very near, passed, not again to threaten.

Since then nationalism and all that it connotes has powerfully seized the imagination of the people of the British Empire, and it is to a people with no common religion and no common tongue an ideal as well as an aspiration, recognized by all of them that the greater the development of nationalism the more impregnable the Empire becomes.

We have not yet reached our full development, but the events of the past year have tremendously accelerated it. Those of us who a few years ago urged federation as the only means to save the Empire from dissolution were told that we were unnecessarily alarmed, that everything was going very well, and that it was folly to disturb existing arrangements. Now we are confident we are in measurable distance of seeing federation a reality. We shall see a council or some similar body sitting in London composed of delegates from all parts of the Empire. We shall see these delegates discuss all questions affecting the Empire at large, foreign policy, tariffs, naval and military armaments, immigration, everything, in short, that is imperial as distinguished from what is only of concern to its separated parts. England will govern herself then as she now does, Canada will make her own laws, but if England must again go to war it will be only after the dominions have been consulted and given their consent, because the British Empire must resist aggression. We shall then think imperially, and thinking imperially we shall think and act nationally. And we shall do that not because we have any further desire to increase the size or might of the British Empire, not because we have any ambition to impose our will on the rest of the world or to force other peoples to adopt our system, our customs, our ideas, or our scheme of civilization, but, to quote a recent writer on the subject, because "we believe it to be not only a great Empire but a good Empire, because on the whole we think it may become the most potent instrument ever forged by human hands to promote the order, the progress, the freedom, and the peace of the world."